

Testimony of Montana Association of Churches

(Abigail St. Lawrence, lobbyist)

Opponent of HB 50

Testimony to Senate Local Government Committee

February 18, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to you in written format. Unfortunately, three conflicting hearings prevent me from presenting testimony in person. The Montana Association of Churches ("MAC") represents over 180,000 Montanans and over 580 individual churches throughout the state in eight Christian denominations: the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the American Baptist Church. One of MAC's top legislative priorities is humane and just immigration policy and practice that respects the law while demonstrating the principle of loving our neighbors as ourselves and welcoming the stranger. As such, MAC opposes HB 50.

MAC does not condone illegal immigration. However, the religious teachings of MAC's member churches are to love our neighbors as ourselves and to follow Jesus' example of reaching out to the strangers in our midst. The beliefs of MAC's member churches also guide us to offer hospitality and comfort to all. MAC is concerned that HB 50 will preclude and perhaps even punish efforts to offer basic human comfort and justice to all, such as through hunger prevention programs and homeless shelters, without regard to immigration status.

HB 50 also capitalizes on the human fear of the "other," a fear that has had tragic consequences throughout history, manifested through racial, religious, and ethnic profiling, discrimination, and even genocide. HB 50 sends a message far broader than just preventing illegal immigration. HB 50 communicates to even legal immigrants that if you do not look or sound like "us," you are not welcome here. As a nation and a state built by immigrants, we Montanans are better than this.

Please recommend a "do not pass" on HB 50. Thank you.